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BOOK REVIEWS

Laggards in Our Schools: A Study of Retardation and Elimination in City School Systems. By LEONARD P. AYRES, A.M. New York: Charities Publication, 1909. Pp. 120.

This is the second volume which has appeared as a result of the Backward Children Investigation conducted by the Russell Sage Foundation under the general direction of Dr. Luther H. Gulick, a preliminary report of the work having been published under the title of *Medical Inspection of Schools* by Dr. Gulick and Mr. Ayres. Several of the chapters of this book have appeared as articles in the *Psychological Clinic* and elsewhere, and a report of the study in as far as it related to the New York City schools has been incorporated in the annual report of Superintendent Maxwell for 1908.

The book, although very clearly written, is not a merely popular discussion of the subject as the wording of the title might lead one to suspect, but gives evidence of careful research, of keen analysis of the material presented, and of much insight into statistical procedure.

The most significant of the general results as summarized by Dr. Gulick in an introductory statement are:

- “(1) That the most important causes of retardation of school children can be removed;
- “(2) That the old-fashioned virtues of regularity of attendance and faithfulness are major elements of success;
- “(3) That some cities are already accomplishing excellent results by measures that can be adopted by all;
- “(4) That relatively few children are so defective as to prevent success in school or in life.”

The class of pupils made the particular object of study are the so-called “retarded” pupils. A special meaning is attached to this word. Children “who are older than they should be for the grade they are in are considered ‘retarded.’” The term, therefore, covers both “those who are over-age on account of slow progress and those who have progressed normally but entered school late.” As used, the word does not, therefore, necessarily denote a pathological condition, but simply the school status. A justification for this use of the term is given in chap. iv.

From a study of the data from 31 cities, it is concluded that “approximately one-third of all of the children in our city schools are above the normal age for their grades—they are retarded.” There is a very considerable variation between the various cities and even between the schools of the same city (New York City). One city showed but 7.5 per cent. of retardation, while at the other extreme one city is cited as showing 75.8 of retardation. Differences of over 25 per cent. were found in different schools in New York City. A careful analysis of the effects of the factors of population, retardation, and elimination on the number of pupils in the succeeding grades is made in chap. iii, and on the basis

of the method there established a comparison and criticism is made in chap. vi of the "Elimination Study of the Bureau of Education." The results presented differ from the latter study in presenting evidence to show first that "the general tendency of our schools is to hold practically all of the pupils to the sixth grade," and, in the second place, that about one-half of the pupils who enter school finish the seven or more grades. The earlier study argued that this proportion was about one-third, and that extensive elimination began with the third grade or earlier.

Some of the more detailed results of general interest are as follows:

"It is safe to count on 10 per cent. of the children leaving on reaching the age of thirteen, 40 per cent. by the time they are fourteen, 50 per cent. of the remainder at fifteen, and again 50 per cent of the remainder at the age of sixteen."

The same fact stated in terms of the grade reached is that "the general tendency of city school systems is to keep all of the children to the fifth grade, to drop half of them by the time the eighth grade is reached and to carry one in ten to the fourth year of the high school."

"According to the New York investigation, among each one hundred retarded pupils thirty are retarded because of late entrance; thirteen because of late entrance and slow progress; and fifty-seven because of slow progress.

"The courses of study of our city school systems are adjusted to the power of the brighter pupils. They are beyond the powers of the average pupils and far beyond those of the slower ones."

"The average pupil cannot complete the work of eight grades in eight years. So far as can be ascertained, in no city does the average child regularly succeed in doing each year's work in one year. The average child in the average city school system progresses through the grades at the rate of eight grades in ten years."

There is little or no relation between foreign birth or parentage and retardation in school; "ignorance of the English language does not constitute a serious handicap."

Physical defects have, as has been well established, an important bearing on the progress of school children. Especially is it true that there are more dull children suffering from enlarged glands, defective breathing, and adenoids than there are of bright children.

Irregular attendance is an important cause of retardation and is very prevalent. "Such figures as are available indicate that in our cities less than three-fourths of the children continue in attendance as much as three-fourths of the year."

The factor of sex is also important, and very instructive results are presented in this connection. Retardation among boys in elementary schools is shown to be 13 per cent. more prevalent than among girls. The conclusions drawn seem warranted by the data presented that "our schools as they exist are better fitted to the needs and natures of the girl than of the boy pupils."

The age of the pupil is a further important element in retardation and elimination. The age of starting to school is not, however, the controlling factor, but the retention of pupils at the upper ages.

"The reason why retention at the upper ages and not age at starting is the controlling factor in securing a large percentage of survivors is that our school

courses are too difficult to be completed in eight years by the average child who starts at the age of five, six, or seven, and our systems of grading are too inflexible to permit the more mature child to make up the handicap he is under through late start."

The children who start late to school are apt to progress more rapidly than those who start early, but most of the former never graduate. "Those who start early are the ones most likely to finish."

Remedial measures and means for increasing the efficiency of schools in the matters of the advance and progress of pupils are discussed in concluding chapters.

The results of the study, as outlined above, are very evidently of much importance in the general administration of our public schools, and should lead to further studies at first hand by school superintendents and by grade teachers in their own school systems.

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